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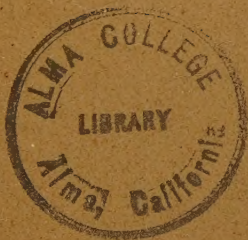
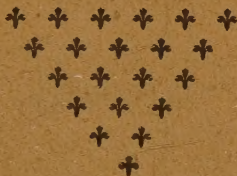




Advice on Prayer

from

Fra Thomas of Jesus





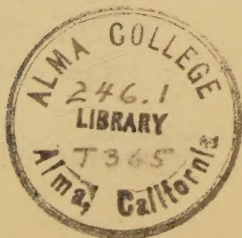
ADVICE ON PRAYER

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TAKEN FROM THE

“SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST”

BY FRA THOMAS OF JESUS, *and Arranged by a*
RELIGIOUS OF THE ORDER OF ST BENEDICT



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SPIRITUAL ADVICE

I

INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THE FRUIT WE MAY REAP FROM PRAYER

It happens only too often that those who aspire to Christian perfection are deceived in their manner of understanding spiritual things. When they read the lives of the saints, and consider their austerities, their fervour, their ecstasies, and the other extraordinary favours which the Holy Spirit is wont to operate in such mortified souls, they are delighted with what is wonderful in them, without considering what was the foundation of the whole edifice and the way by which they arrived at such great sanctity. This error is so much the more frequent in our time, because matters of piety are become more common, and every one speaks about them, though very few apply themselves seriously to them or have personal experience of them.

These erroneous opinions gain colour from

the fact that God, who is always wonderful in his works, often communicates himself with so much sweetness and light to those who enter his service that they begin to judge of their progress by these first impressions, which are so sweet and sensible; thus they easily imagine they have made a great advance in virtue. Like a man who knows nothing of painting, who, seeing a first sketch by some excellent artist, looks upon it with admiration, and imagines it to be a finished work, whereas a skilful painter would judge that much time and labour are still required to complete it; so these persons, deluded by some resemblance they find between the holy sentiments which the mercy of God arouses in them and what they have read or heard of the interior state of the saints, imagine themselves already perfect, erect their spiritual building with no foundation, and at last discover, by fatal relapses, how much they were deceived.

Three things commonly unmask this deception. The first is a certain security, to which they falsely give the name of peace, on which they so firmly depend that they will no longer listen to the counsel of anyone. They easily condemn and judge others under a pretence of zeal, although the saints tell us that in the ways of God we must consult experienced persons; that it is very remote from contemplation to abound in one's own sense; and that the characteristic of true virtue is to have a

great regard for our neighbour, and a great contempt of ourselves. The second thing, which is a consequence of the first, is an attachment to their own will, which renders them incapable of brooking the least contradiction, under a pretence of loving the truth. They are commonly impatient, critical, censorious, ready to blame others, and so eager to excuse their own faults, as even to desire to make them pass for virtues; yet it is quite certain that there is no virtue without denial of one's own will, without patience, meekness, and silence. The third mark of their delusion is that they are so possessed with the beauty of their own way and with the consolation they feel in the exercises of piety, that they forget to apply themselves to the exercise of Christian virtues, and even look on them as an impediment, although without doubt they are the most solid fruit of all spiritual exercises, and, as it were, the nerves and sinews of an interior life.

A whole book would be necessary to show all the dangers to which such souls are exposed, the grievous falls they have reason to fear, and the means of preventing such lapses or of rising again after them. The most powerful of these is fully to know in what spiritual life really consists, and to regulate one's whole conduct in accordance with this knowledge. Now this life consists in two things: mortification and the love of God.

That mortification which does not kindle love is suspicious; the love which does not mortify does not deserve the name of love. He who would approach to God must not separate these two things, in which lie both the foundation and the height of perfection; but because God and the soul concur together in many free actions, the interior life becomes subject to many illusions, which arise from the difficulty of distinguishing what proceeds from God, and what from man.

Wherefore he that would walk securely chiefly applies himself to mortification, is careful of dying to himself, and leaves to God, who is faithful to his promises and the sole master of perfection, the care of communicating to him, in his own time and manner, such gifts as he pleases. Yet it is true that God seldom communicates his higher gifts to any but mortified souls; if he bestows any of them on such as are not so, it is only to induce them to mortification and the love of the cross.

Mortification chiefly consists in an entire and constant resignation of oneself and of all exterior, interior, and celestial goods into the hands of God, without any voluntary reservation. This is easily said and agreeable to hear, but infinitely difficult to practise because it is the exact opposite of all that nature desires. This is the combat spoken of by St Paul (Gal. v 17), *of the flesh against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh*: the flesh desires

to be at liberty, while the spirit would bring it into subjection to itself and to the will of God. This victory is the end which the spiritual man proposes to himself in all his exercises of piety, that he may become a pliable instrument in the hands of God, who never fails to bestow his blessings plentifully on those souls in which he finds such good dispositions. For the more free, disengaged from passions, submissive and resigned to the will of God the spirit is, the more purely divine love operates in it; in proportion also as love is purified, resignation becomes perfect; so that these two virtues go hand in hand, as one may say, and assist one another; resignation augments love, and love perfects resignation.

This entire resignation to the order of God being, then, the foundation of sanctity and the most perfect preparation for the gifts of the Holy Ghost, we must not wonder if both the devil and corrupt nature endeavour so much to destroy it, and if it is opposed by all manner of temptations. It is for this reason that God, who knows all our evils and their remedies, has so wisely ordained that the cross and sufferings should be the way to heaven. For, on the one hand, the sense of pain, taking from man the enjoyment of pleasure, disengages him by degrees from the earth; on the other, the experience of his own misery obliges him to have recourse to God. Thus the cross produces simultaneously these

two most salutary effects; it breaks the chains which link us to the world and it brings us to Christ.

God has established true wisdom in the cross; out of this way lie nothing but labyrinths and precipices. It was his good pleasure that the cross should be a certain proof of his love, that his most intimate friends should have the largest share of it, and that they should place their delight in it in consideration of his love. No one has he exempted from it, not even those in whom he has found the greatest purity and innocence; the most Blessed Virgin, the purest of all creatures, was also the most crucified.

One cannot imagine, without having experienced it, what those saints suffer who appear the fullest of the love of God, and the most "prevented with the blessings of his sweetness." The fervour of their charity becomes to them an inexhaustible source of crosses, the weight of which increases daily in proportion to their love. Christ was pleased to subject himself to this law, and to manifest to us how much he loved us, by showing us with his blood the way we were to follow. For since the moment of his first becoming man for us, as he found no time nor place but what was proper for loving, neither did he find any but was proper for suffering. Neither his Mother's womb, his infancy, nor his youth were exempted from suffering.

and it has often been said that from the first moment of his life until his death he was continually upon the cross.

Since this means is so necessary for obtaining true wisdom, and yet, on the other hand, nature has such a shrinking from it, nothing undoubtedly is more profitable to the soul to assist it in carrying the burthen of its cross and subjecting itself to God in all things than the remembrance of Christ's sufferings, for they make us understand what our Lord has done for us, how much he deserves our love, and with what confidence we may cast ourselves into the arms of so loving a Father. If his love induced him to sacrifice even himself for our salvation, will he forget anything that can make us happy when we resign ourselves to him without any reserve? This resignation produces in all the accidents of life an unalterable peace and tranquillity of mind, because the consideration of the sufferings and love of our Lord Jesus Christ makes us receive from his hand the greatest afflictions that can befall us. From this arises also an entire confidence in his mercy with regard to what is past, present, and to come; accompanied by an equal distrust of ourselves, when we consider that our wounds were so very great that the sufferings and death of a God were necessary to heal them. This thought inspires us with a saving horror of ourselves and of our sins, and shows us clearly

the depth of our misery, which renders us capable of falling by our own weakness into the greatest of crimes, and makes it impossible for us to rise again without the help of the sufferings of a Saviour.

All these considerations excite in us an ardent love for his divine Person, a love that is efficacious and urges us to become like him, to repair the time we have spent without loving and imitating him, and to run incessantly after the odour of the perfumes of Jesus, suffering and crucified.

The love of Christ and the desire of imitating him produce another very considerable advantage which may be regarded as one of the foundations of a spiritual life—that is, a sweet facility in virtuous actions. For though the soul is not always in a position to practise them, yet it has, by this love, an actual relish of all virtues; when the occasion presents itself, it will always be ready to perform the necessary acts. This is perhaps what the holy Fathers mean when they affirm that *all virtues are practised in prayer* (St Chrys. i 2, *de orand. Deo*), which cannot be understood of every virtue in particular, for their matter is not always to be found in prayer; they mean, rather, that the love of God is practised in prayer, and this produces in the soul the same effect as frequent acts of the other virtues would do, by giving it that facility and inclination to the exercise of

them which by the doctors is called a "habit." Thus St Paul says (1 Cor. xiii 4, 7) that *charity is patient, is kind; that it believes all things, hopes all things, bears all things*, because it urges us to please Jesus Christ, and to do everything which can make us more like him.

The mind of man cannot conceive what treasures of graces flow from these three sources, which the meditation of the sufferings of Christ produces in us—namely, the love of our Saviour, the imitation of his virtues, and the resignation of ourselves into the hands of God. Souls that persevere in this holy exercise ought to find entire contentment in being filled with honey out of that rock, and with drinking deep draughts of the sweet liquor which flows from our Saviour's wounds. His cross is a frightful spectacle to the eyes of worldlings, yet it is the source of life, the way of salvation, and, as it were, the ladder by which we ascend to the highest perfection.

In order to reap advantage from the meditation of the sufferings of Christ, we must enter upon our prayer with the intention of inflaming our hearts with the fire of his love, and of resigning ourselves entirely to him, imitating him with a perfect fidelity. We must try to keep always before our eyes that as in heaven "we shall be like God, because we shall see him as he is" (John iii 2), so also we shall become like Jesus Christ when we often behold him such as he is upon his cross.

He that says he abides in him, even as he has walked, so ought he also to walk (1 John ii 6). Now he walked in such a manner that he became very like us in our misery; we, therefore, out of gratitude and love, ought chiefly to employ ourselves in becoming like him in his sufferings. For if we only look upon spiritual things as if they were just one among our other ordinary occupations, upon which we are willing to spend some short time, the rest of the actions of life will be performed without fruit, and we shall take little heed when we omit for any cause our pious exercises; but if we look upon them as the most important business of our lives, and the end for which God has placed us in this world, as well as the seed of our eternal happiness, they will produce in us admirable fruits of sanctity and virtue.

This has been well expressed by St John Chrysostom in a few words. "If," he says, "you are sufficient for God, why is not God sufficient for you?" (*Serm. i de Ascens.*). That is, if you were the principal end which Jesus Christ proposed to himself, and the cause of his labours and mortal life; is it not reasonable that he should be also the end of your actions, and the principle of your life? Let us remember that when Christ became man the first motion of his heart was a loving resignation to the will of his Father; he accepted, with a voluntary submission, whatever was

needful to be suffered for our salvation; his first words, as St Luke relates, were: *I must be about those things that are my Father's* (Luke ii 49); the last which he pronounced before his death were: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit* (Luke xxiii 46). Our Saviour's conduct, then, was always uniform: he began his life by obeying, loving, and suffering; he continued and finished it in the same manner. For this reason his true friends account all those days of their life lost which they have not employed in loving and imitating him.

II

HOW TO PROFIT BY SPIRITUAL READING AND MEDITATION

It is quite certain that God is liberal in communicating motives, feelings, and interior inspirations to those who desire to be his servants, by means of which he inflames and dilates their hearts, that he may induce them to walk in his ways with greater confidence and ease. He enlightens their understanding with heavenly truths, inflames their will with his love, and sometimes teaches them more in one moment by the unction of his Spirit than all the masters and books in the world could do in many years. Nevertheless, it is according to order and the advice of the saints that when that divine sun hides himself behind the clouds, beginners and even those who have made some progress should have recourse to instruction, reading, and preparation. Such means usually help the mind to be more attentive and recollected, fill the memory with good thoughts, awake the will, soften the hardness and dryness of the soul, and lead it into the ways of prayer with more safety; for want of this precaution people often

fall into a dangerous laziness and aridity; because they have not been taught in what manner they should at such times treat with God, they begin their prayer with distaste, finish it with disgust and disappointment, and at last leave it off altogether.

It is therefore not only profitable but even necessary for beginners to have a director, to prescribe for them the subjects and the manner of their prayer, and who will know how to guide them according to their gifts and dispositions, in the way by which God is leading them. For though the end is the same for all—namely, to be united with God by love, to become like him by imitation, and to submit themselves entirely to him by the spirit of mortification and resignation, yet he makes use of a multitude of different ways to lead them to the same goal. Some go thither by the hatred of themselves and their sins; others by the sweet attraction of his presence; others, again, by the transports of his love and the desire of possessing him: all these different ways make us admire the greatness of God and the infinite treasures of his wisdom.

He who is so happy as to find a wise and prudent director reaps much profit in a short time if he is faithful in obedience. This is especially seen in religious houses, where the novices are directed by spiritual and experienced masters, who watch them closely and

lead them as it were step by step in the way which God opens before them, until they can walk without a guide; such, when they are well established in the exercise of mortification and familiar intercourse with God, become men truly spiritual.

In some religious Orders there may indeed be found persons considerable for their doctrine and natural qualities, yet who neglect the practice of mortification; in such houses, not many fervent religious will be found. This shows that it is really those superiors who take little pains about the education of novices, and novice masters whose teaching goes no farther than exterior things, who are responsible for the relaxation of regular discipline. Since they do not provide for those souls whom God has placed under their charge the nourishment of the interior life, little by little the whole Order loses its vigour and falls at last into deplorable remissness.

As to those who live in the world, they may assist themselves in their conduct by the reading of pious books, and by the direction of a prudent confessor or some other servant of God to whom they may have recourse; above all, by the frequentation of the sacraments, which is the most efficacious means of obtaining light from God.

Meditation on the life of our Lord Jesus Christ may usually be based on three points: humility, caused by the knowledge of our own

misery; oblation and resignation of ourselves into the hands of God; and a desire of imitating Jesus Christ and of being like him. These three things, which we ought to keep in view in all our actions and spiritual exercises, should be mingled with aspirations and affections of love; we may also join to them adoration, petition, and thanksgiving, that nothing may be wanting that can kindle in the heart of man a love of the divine beauty and goodness. We need not constrain our minds to follow any particular order in these aspirations our soul should act with freedom, and enter with ease into any affections to which God may attract it.

In order to reap more profit from our prayer it will be good to observe the following directions:

(i.) He who would be a true servant of God must in the first place endeavour to discover his predominant passion, and the faults to which he is most subject, so that he may fight against them by prayer and the practice of the contrary virtues; especially let him continually beg the love of God and humility, because these two virtues purify the soul from whatever is displeasing to God.

(ii.) Let him apply himself to the knowledge and accomplishment of the duties of his state, being fully persuaded that God requires this of him; let him establish his devotion and his prayer upon that foundation. For, as

St Bernard says (Serm. *Ecce nos reliquimus*), the offerings of supererogation are not pleasing to God when we do not perform those which are of obligation. The obligations and duties of our state are those which the law of God exacts of every man in his own condition, of a religious, an ecclesiastic, a magistrate, a judge, a married man, or a father of a family. If any doubt arises in this matter, we must consult God-fearing and learned persons, who will decide what is right for us, not with a view to pleasing men, but solely with regard to God's service and the salvation of those who consult them.

(iii.) After having settled his conscience by a general confession, if need be, let him regulate his plans, occupations, and exercises with relation to a spiritual life, as the principal end which he ought to propose to himself. Now it is one of the miracles of divine grace and wisdom that every state of a lawful life—that is, which does not run counter to the law of God—may be referred to the end of which we speak; indeed, experience daily shows that the actions we perform in order to discharge the duties of our state, though they seem sometimes very distracting of themselves, rather bring us near to God than remove us from him. They actually increase the desire of his presence, and he communicates himself to the soul in such a manner by secret and unknown ways, in the midst of necessary

distractions, that our spiritual progress is never delayed thereby.

(iv.) Let him seek the glory of God in all things, and not content himself with avoiding sin, but aim at and advance in what is most perfect, according to his state of life. Let him compare his desires with those which Jesus Christ would have had on like occasions, which he may easily find out from his doctrine and the example of his life. This is one of the most sure means of advancing in likeness to him, and consequently in sanctity.

(v.) Let all his actions be regulated in such a manner that he may always be employed, making a rule of life for every hour of the day; by this means he will more easily keep from sin, and be less exposed to the temptations of the devil. Let him never begin any action or exercise without raising his heart and mind to God, begging his light and grace, so that he may do nothing but what is for his glory and according to his good pleasure.

(vi.) Let him receive any affliction or pleasure that may befall him with an entire conformity to the divine will, praising and blessing God without intermission, in spite of the repugnances of nature; let him entreat his Divine Majesty not to regard the corrupt sentiments of human weakness, but the good desires with which his bounty has deigned to inspire him; then let him remain in the calmest

disposition he can until the storm has passed over.

(vii.) If he receives from God any particular graces, let him make them known only to those who direct him; to these he ought sincerely to reveal all that happens in his soul, so that he may avoid all errors and escape falling into the snares of the devil.

(viii.) There are many sorts of temptations: some induce us to sin, others withdraw us from perfection. Here is some general advice in regard to both these:

First, to be diffident about those things for which we feel a strong inclination, however good they may seem to us; because everything except God alone, which we seek after with avidity and relinquish with difficulty, is the object of disorderly love, and becomes a source of temptation and a hindrance to the perfect knowledge and pure love of God, which ought to be the aim and end of all our desires.

Secondly, not to allow any thought to remain in our mind which may disturb us, but to resist it in the beginning by imploring the help of God. If it becomes too importunate we must have recourse to our spiritual father, to the use of the sacraments, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin or the saints, and to the avoiding of all occasions which might make us lose our interior peace, for the strongest often yield to these things,

whereas the weak find in flight both strength and victory. The temptations of the flesh and pride are the most dangerous, because they more directly attack the life of the soul, but we must be sure that they never hurt us while they are displeasing to us, that we are not forsaken by God although we may not be sensible of his help; above all must we remember that to leave off our exercises of piety at such a time is nothing but basely yielding to the temptation.

Thus, very far from shunning the remedy and the physician when we are sick, it is just at that time that we must cast ourselves at our Lord's feet with a firm confidence that he will not only assist us in his goodness, but that his wisdom and love will turn all that we suffer to our advantage.

What we have said concerning regularity of life, purity of desires, and resistance to temptations ought to be a great consolation to persons given to prayer, by giving them that confidence with which they must approach to God, and the interior peace so necessary for intercourse with him. I say still more: that though we should find ourselves so oppressed with the remorse of any sin newly committed that we should not dare, out of a just shame, to appear before God, we ought not even then to keep at a distance from him. Let us present ourselves, then, before his mercy, covered with confusion, to acknowledge the greatness of our

evil, and humbly protest to God that we know no other remedy after having offended him than to have recourse to him. That which appears to be a respectful fear is only in truth the effect of a secret pride which cannot bear the shame and humiliation of sin.

(ix.) For the fulfilment of his resolutions, let him not depend on his own merits or industry, but only do the best that lies in him, preparing himself for what it shall please God to do in him, and let him think it is no small matter if he perseveres in this disposition, daily renewing his good desires. Let him be assured that the work of God will always be done in such a manner as is most for his glory and the good of his own soul, but let him not appoint himself the judge of his own advancement nor of the communications of God, who, by a conduct full of wisdom, often hides his operations from us, even when he operates what we desire; for he requires us to live in confidence and resignation, to continue knocking at the gate of his mercy, and to be always sensible of our own poverty and misery.

(x.) Let him, then, never leave off his prayer, whatever dryness he may suffer in it; let him, on the contrary, always persevere in it. Though it be without relish, it is not without fruit, and it is always profitable, though we are not always sensible of its advantage. But when it pleases God to soften our hearts by the experience of his love, we must be attentive

to its operation and not carry our thoughts elsewhere so long as there remains one single spark of this divine fire ; perhaps this spark will produce a great conflagration which will produce in the soul the change it desires.

(xi.) Let him be careful to raise his mind to God often in the day, resigning himself to him, blessing his Holy Name, thanking him for his favours, imploring his help, embracing him lovingly, and sighing after the possession of him ; thus will he keep the fire of divine love perpetually alight in his heart. For it frequently happens that God grants at those moments what he refuses in the time of prayer, to teach us that it is to his goodness, not to our own industry that we owe our happiness ; this also serves to increase our love for him and to diminish our pride.

(xii.) Let him be fully persuaded of these two things ; the one will be a great help to him in his punishments and temptations, that God always proportions them to our strength, and never lays upon us more than we can bear with the assistance of his grace. For as a holy solitary very wisely observed, although we always feel the temptation before the grace, yet it is certain that grace always precedes the temptation, since God never permits temptation except according to the measure of grace : this ought to inspire us with great courage and confidence. The other is, the remembrance of God's presence, especially

on such occasions as are in themselves distracting, when we must observe, as far as we can, a respectful attention to God who sees us and acts with us; by this means the door of divine communications will not be shut, but we shall always be in a state of being *introduced*, whenever our Lord shall please, *into the cellar of his delicious wines* (Cant. ii 2), where he pours out the torrent of his love, where he dispels the clouds which hide him from us, where he communicates himself familiarly to the soul, where far from the noise of human words and in the silence of universal nature, he speaks to us himself, heart to heart, and where he sleeps and rests in peace with us (Ps. iv 9). Grant us this grace, Lord, if it be for thy glory and the advancement of thy service.

III

SOME ADVICE HOW TO PROCEED WHEN THE HOUR FOR PRAYER HAS COME

HE who would apply himself to the exercise of mental prayer ought, when the hour of prayer is come, to behold with the eye of faith God present in the bottom of his heart, more intimate to the soul than it is to itself; or he may consider himself at his feet as a miserable creature, placing God far above him. He may also regard himself as plunged in the immensity of God as a fish is in the sea; or encompassed on every side by his goodness, as a man would be with the light of the sun at midday, in an open place. Let him choose whichever of these or any other considerations will inspire him most with respect, attention, faith, confidence and union with God, and be assured that his goodness will hear him favourably. Let him afterwards cast his eyes upon the mystery he proposes to meditate upon, not looking upon it as past but as present, as it is indeed in the idea of God. For if the action of the mystery be past, the virtue of it is not so, nor the love wherewith Christ performed it,

for that love is infinite, immutable, always the same, as ardent now as when he shed his blood and gave his life for our salvation, being most ready to do it again, if it were necessary.

Let the understanding act as little as possible; for besides having but little light while the soul is yet imprisoned in the body, it ought only to serve for preparing the way for the will, and opening, as one may say, the gate to love. Now if God vouchsafes through his mercy, without the help of the understanding and imagination, to fill our souls with a sweet peace, or with the admiration of those truths which faith reveals to us, or with a lively sorrow at the sight of our sins and the sufferings of our Saviour; with regret for having begun so late to love him or with a desire of being entirely his; or again with a transport of love which may induce us to embrace him with ardent affection, or, finally, with any other motion which may serve to unite us with God, we must remain calmly therein, without employing ourselves with any other thought, however holy it may appear to us; not that our thoughts need be bad, but because the soul finds in this interior peace the fruit and end of all good thoughts.

The mind of man is too limited in its operations in this life to think on many things at once. It is a disorder to sow when we ought to reap, and a temptation to desire to fill ourselves with holy thoughts when we should

be gathering the fruit of those we have. Let the soul, therefore, enjoy the fruit of its past labours and take its rest; as a sheep does that has taken its fill. Without troubling itself to seek for fresh grass, which perhaps it could not digest, it sweetly chews over again what it has already eaten. A day will come when the soul, being freed from the weight of this earthly body, will find itself equally possessed of knowledge and love, without the one being any impediment to the other.

The time of prayer being ended, retire from it with a disposition of peace and love, as one who possesses God within himself. Apply yourself afterwards to your ordinary affairs with a recollected mind, and endeavour to preserve the fervour, light, and repose of prayer. But if it has been accompanied with dryness and heaviness of mind do not be grieved, but bless the Lord who is always just in his judgements. Acknowledge your own unworthiness, offer him your troubles, protesting that you did not undertake your prayer in order to obtain consolations, but to accomplish his holy will, to which you entirely resign yourself. Finally, examine what may have been the cause of your distractions; if they come from your own fault and negligence, either before or during the time of prayer, accuse yourself of this with sorrow, and punish yourself for it by saying some prayer in the spirit of satisfaction; by this means it will

come about that going from prayer humbled and confounded, you will reap no less fruit from it than if you had been filled with consolation. God, who takes more care of our spiritual progress than we can ourselves do, also knows much better than we do what is good for us. Therefore in our prayer we ought to resign ourselves entirely into his hands with a sincere desire of serving him, not according to our own will but his good pleasure; thanking him equally whether he humbles or comforts us, for in both cases does he show himself equally a Father full of affection and goodness.

But that our mind may be more recollected, and so better disposed to treat with God, it is of great importance to give him the first fruits of our heart in the morning, by raising our hearts to him on our first awaking. We should also do this at certain times in the day by frequent aspirations; lastly, let us lay ourselves down to rest at night in his presence and at his feet. For it is very difficult for him who lets his mind be distracted in other actions to find recollection in prayer. Purity of heart is also a necessary disposition for the reception of the divine communications, and the daily examination of conscience.

IV

CERTAIN SPIRITUAL MAXIMS

1. To be continually on our guard lest our heart become entangled with any object, desire, or thought which may be displeasing to God.

2. To be frequently mindful of his presence, that we may adore and bless him with a profound respect.

3. Not to commit any fault, whether exterior or interior, without immediately conceiving sorrow and begging pardon for it.

4. Never to form any resolution without first consulting God, so that we may do nothing but what is conformable to his will.

5. To be watchful in mortifying our senses and particularly our tongue, that nothing may escape them but what is regular and just.

6. To do to our neighbour, whoever he may be, all the good we can, and so to enlarge our heart towards him that the power of assisting him may always be wanting rather than the will.

7. Never to harbour any hatred or bitterness, however small it may be, and though of ever so short duration.

8. Never to suffer any sin on our conscience,

especially if it is considerable, without bewailing it, and having recourse, if need be, to the sacrament of penance.

9. Never to neglect our exercises of piety nor the inspirations of God; and faithfully to carry out all his inspirations.

10. To be distrustful of those things for which we feel a strong inclination, whether they are good or bad; and to have always the fear of God before our eyes.

11. Not to be attached to our own will, but to condescend to that of others, when it may be done without sin.

12. Not to have any esteem of ourselves, and to do nothing for gaining that of other men; to set before ourselves only God's glory, and never to prefer ourselves before anyone else, however imperfect he may appear to us.

13. To bless God in all the accidents of life, and to receive them at his hands with thanksgiving.

V

OF OBEDIENCE

IF we consider attentively Jesus Christ as the model of all perfection, we shall discover that as God has included the whole observance of his law in charity, he has also reduced the working out of charity itself to the practice of obedience: *If ye love me, he says, keep my commandments ; he that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me ; he that loveth me not keepeth not my words* (John xiv 15, 21, 24). So that we do not please God if we love him not, and we love him not if we do not obey him. Love and obedience produce the same effects and have the same reward ; the want of either is equally punished and stands in need of the same remedy ; obedience is increased by love, and love is perfected by obedience. Love sanctifies the soul and obtains for it the favours of heaven ; obedience confirms and secures the possession of them. By disobedience love is lost, and temporal and spiritual punishments are incurred ; obedience, on the contrary, re-establishes love and reconciles us to God, so that all Christian perfection seems to be contained in this virtue.

Disobedience commonly proceeds from three poisoned sources. The first is the esteem of ourselves, which is nothing else than a blindness of the soul which, hindering us from seeing our own imperfection, makes us impatiently bear in another the superiority which we think we see in ourselves. The second source is the attachment to our own judgement, which is always attended with obstinacy and pride, and is most difficult to be healed. As the cure of this evil must come from heaven we ought most earnestly to beg it from God and endeavour at the same time to repress in ourselves the spirit of contradiction, to keep our reason under a strict guard, and not to prefer ourselves to anyone whatsoever.

The third source of this fault is an irregular or inordinate attachment to anything whatsoever; when we give our heart to any object apart from God, we commonly withdraw ourselves from obedience, either for our own satisfaction or to please the one whom we love. It is to remedy this evil that Jesus Christ says to us in the Gospel: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*—me who, in the course of my whole life, found neither pleasure nor rest in anything but obedience.

Obedience may be considered with respect to three classes of persons: First, with relation to those who by duty of their state command others; with these, we need not concern our-

selves now. Secondly, with relation to those who neither command nor obey anyone. Thirdly, with those who have made a vow of obedience. The first are exposed to great dangers, but they have also equally great occasions of merit; the second walk more safely; but the third are infinitely happy, if they know rightly how to appreciate their condition. All ought continually to have regard to the law and will of God, as the needle of the compass has to the pole.

The obedience of those in the second class consists entirely in the perfect fulfilment of the will of God, in whatever way he may make it known to us; yet, in our days, so little heed is paid to this that he who makes it the rule of his conduct passes for an extraordinary, singular, austere, unsociable, and extravagant person. We ought to live, say they, like others, and only follow the common way; but this life and these ways proceed from *the prudence of the flesh*, which, says the apostle, *is death*, and from the *wisdom of this world* (Rom. viii 6), which is *folly with God* (1 Cor. iii 9). True prudence is to live according to the law of God, and he who is subject to God in all things offers him a continual and always agreeable holocaust.

The obedience of religious is imperfect if they do not join to their exterior act the will of obeying and the submission of their own judgement. Those who have reached that

purity and simplicity of obedience which makes them regard the order of their superior as the will of God enjoy a continual peace. But he who behaves in such a manner as to admit of no commands but such as he pleases, who examines and judges his superior, who in his obedience has more regard to the will of man than to that of God, ought not to flatter himself that his obedience is true. Here are three excellent maxims for the instruction of those under a vow of obedience :

1. He who seeks his own will, or endeavours to bring his superior to his own way of thinking, has neither peace nor the merit of true obedience.

2. In a religious state there is neither holy zeal nor virtuous prudence if both are not founded upon a perfect submission to the Rule and superiors in everything that is not contrary to the law of God.

3. Whosoever desires to find that perfect peace promised to the truly obedient ought to obey man for the love of God.

VI

OF POVERTY

FROM all that Jesus Christ preached in the latter years of his life we may easily guess what he practised in the earlier. We have good reason to conclude how much he must have loved this virtue when we consider the prominent place he gave to it in his sermon on the Mount, which contains an abstract of all his teaching, and which he began by the praise of poverty. From the beginning and end of his life we can judge what must have been the character of the intervening years; none but those that feel the hardships of poverty can understand what it cost him. His diet was poor, often bad, and such as his parents could gain with him by their toil, for they applied themselves more to divine things than to procuring themselves the necessaries of life. In a word, the King of the universe so deprived himself of everything that he did not even reserve his own body and life, since he sacrificed both for our salvation. He would not have given us such a great example of *poverty* if it had not been the *basis and foundation* of Christian perfection. For the principal end of his doctrine was to kindle in us a pure

love of those goods for which we were created ; and in that love he found the universal remedy for all our ills, which all spring from oblivion of eternal things and attachment to those which are temporal. Therefore Christ, who came upon earth to kindle the fire of divine love, gave the first rank among the virtues to poverty. *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his justice*, he says to us, *and all things else shall be added unto you. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* St Augustine gives to this virtue the name of humility, because it tears up the root of pride in us by destroying the vain confidence and presumption with which the prosperity of the world inspires us. The saints, who were illuminated by God, judged themselves poor when they possessed the riches of this world, and rich in the greatest poverty, because they realized that all earthly goods put together can never satisfy the human heart, while the spiritual goods which it possesses in God alone can fill it. Thus evangelical poverty ought rather to be called plenty than poverty.

There are in the Church two sorts of poor : the first who have abundance of earthly wealth, but have their hearts entirely disengaged ; the others renounce all temporal possessions that they may serve God with greater freedom. The rich who aspire to poverty in spirit have two extremities to fear : prodigality and avarice. The latter is the

most odious, for the prodigal does good to many, while the avaricious man does good to no one, not even to himself; the one loves to give, the other to receive, and our Saviour has said that *it is more blessed to give than to receive* (Acts xx 35).

Those who have renounced the riches of the world by a religious profession ought to remember that the poor Jesus is their treasure, and that in his poverty all their riches consist. Now in regard of those who have thus offered up all without reserve in the sincerity of their heart, Jesus is that mysterious book written within and without (Apoc. v 1), wherein they read this excellent truth. But he is a book shut and sealed with seven seals, which can neither be opened nor read by those whose sacrifice is imperfect and who commit theft upon the holocaust. Hence it is that they are often in as much trouble over the loss or refusal of a trifle as an avaricious person would be at the loss of his treasure, being so much the further from the poverty of divine love as they are the less faithful in small things. Unless the religious is a devout man, he cannot be truly poor in spirit; it is prayer which separates him from the earth and purifies his love. Although he may satisfy his conscience by avoiding all property, he will never attain to evangelical poverty nor relish its sweetness but by intercourse with God, which consumes and destroys all earthly affections.

VII

OF MORTIFICATION

ALL Christians ought to imitate the exterior penance and austere life of Christ, but discreetly, everyone according to his condition and state of life. To this end the following rules may be observed :

1. We must have regard to the necessities of the body and not to its appetites, and apply ourselves to know its true necessities with relation to the circumstances of time, place, employment, and disposition, interior and exterior, for it is difficult to prescribe a rule that will suit everyone. But it may be said, in general, that a religious man deceives himself when, under pretence of necessity, he procures for himself delicacies and things that are superfluous to the prejudice of temperance, mortification, poverty, recollection, freedom of mind, and even charity towards his brethren, since one often is in want of necessities while another enjoys luxuries.

2. We must not allow to nature without extreme caution what it seeks with too much

ardour; for this purpose we must study all its vicious inclinations because they are the source of all excess.

3. Everyone ought to be attentive to his spiritual advancement, always believing that he does less than is in his power to do, and that he deceives himself when he thinks that he does more than he ought. By this means he will use with more fear and less freedom even those things that are necessary.

4. Practise especially that particular austerity which is most suited for combating the vice into which you most frequently fall, and to which you are most inclined. Liberty of speech is better cured by silence than by fasting; impurity by a guard over the senses and employing ourselves with God than by silence. It often happens that those who do not observe this rule are very austere without becoming the better thereby.

5. That penance which consists in watchings, hair-cloth, disciplines, a hard bed and mean clothes is always salutary when it is imposed upon us by the precepts of the Church, the rules of our state, or the counsel of a wise man. It is hurtful when it hinders us from discharging our obligations; blamable when it proceeds from self-will; but much the more commendable when it subjects the flesh the better to the spirit, provided, however, that we do not neglect other more important mortifications.

6. The safest and most necessary mortification is that which regulates the senses, passions, tongue, and conversation; which cuts off idleness and all occasions of sinning, and mortifies obstinacy in our own opinion, self-will, and the vain esteem of ourselves. This kind of mortification has a great advantage over the other, in that we practise it without danger to ourselves; it is also difficult to exceed in it; the carnal man fears it much more than the exterior, he never gets used to it or ceases to feel its effects.

7. But the severest of all penances, according to the testimony of the Saints and experienced persons, is interior recollection and continual prayer. Those who apply themselves to it know this very well, and there are very few who, if they listened to the voice of nature, but would willingly employ the time they spend in prayer in the most painful bodily labour. The reason of this is because the liberty of thinking, so natural to man, is thereby constrained; his appetites are repressed, his movements checked, his will bound, his mind attentive, that no entrance may be given to anything that may distract it, or trouble the repose of his heart; the whole man is, as it were, in captivity, and cannot move towards what he loves nor enjoy what he desires. And though by long use one may arrive at a life that is quiet, content, and full of those holy delights which spring from divine love; though

everything in us should be rightly ordered and the body in subjection to the mind, it is often so weakened and debilitated and destroyed thereby that it stands in need of refreshment. Yet one scarcely dares to yield to it in anything except with great reserve, for fear of departing from that state of continual death, and of prejudicing the union of the soul with God by the refreshment of the body.

Would to God that all who are touched with the spirit of penance would adhere to this! The best counsel that can be given to persons whose weak health, or the nature of their state, renders them less capable of corporal austerities, is to apply themselves faithfully to the exercise of prayer, wherein they may find an excellent manner of practising the virtue of penance.

8. Many, by reading the lives of the Saints, are touched with the desire of serving God and of working out their salvation, but are discouraged at the penance of these mortified men. Let them know that this discouragement is a snare set for them by the devil to retain them in tepidity; that God does not require them to imitate the austerity of the Saints, but to follow their spirit. Then will he illuminate them with his light, and inspire them to do what shall be most fitting for expiating their sins and destroying in them what is most opposite to the perfection of divine love. In the mean-

while, let them bless God in his Saints, whose penance they admire; humbling and exciting themselves to do what lies in their power: for in heaven there are many mansions and stars of different magnitude.



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